

A Pledge of Purpose

I Peter 3:21

For those of you who are Detroit Tiger fans, this has been a very, very difficult year. Given the talent throughout the club, the season began with some hopes of a division championship and beyond. But they just couldn't put the numbers together and eventually they had to come to the realization that changes needed to be made. And drastic changes they were.

In mid-July they traded outfielder J.D. Martinez. At the end of July they traded catcher Alex Avila. In September they traded outfielder Justin Upton.

There had been hints before, but the crushing blow of this dismal season came at the end of August when they traded pitcher Justin Verlander. In 2011 when he won the Cy Young award, sports casters were predicting a stellar career calculating at the pace he was winning games he would easily reach 300 wins. They expected him to retire with the Tigers. With only a 10 and 8 record this year he was traded at the last minute to the Houston Astros. Since joining the team he has recorded a 5-0 record, even pitching the team's pennant clinching game.

It was difficult to see him pitching in another uniform. Donning the Astros cap and jersey meant that he had severed his ties with the Tigers. If and when he should face them in a game it would mean that he wouldn't give them anything to help them out just for good old time's sake. He now belonged to another team, immersed in their culture and clubhouse. His allegiance had changed and the proof was in his attire and attitude to help them win.

Peter wrote to a group of people whose allegiance had changed. This change resulted in persecution for their new faith. How should they act? Should they live their faith in secret to avoid trouble? Should they go along with the flow, melt into the culture and live like everyone else? Back in chapter 2 Peter exhorted them, regardless of status, whether

as normal citizens or as a slave or as a woman, they were to visibly live their faith by submitting to those in authority over them, even if that authority was not a Christian, even if they were accused and abused. So long as it did not violate the commands of God they were to submit. Beginning in verse 8 of chapter 3 Peter gave some general instructions on how they should act in an intolerant, even hostile environment.

Live harmoniously

Live sympathetically

Live lovingly

Live compassionately

Live humbly

He reminded this audience that the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and His ears are attentive to their prayers. He is opposed to the wicked. Then he offered this hope that even if they suffer for doing good, God saw their plight and would in His time repay those who stood in opposition to His followers. They were to live such godly lives before their accusers and attackers that they would ask about the reason they lived the way they did. They were to be ready with an answer or a defense of the gospel.

Peter then gave them the ultimate example of one who suffered for doing good, the Lord Jesus Christ. Verse 18 says that the one who was righteous and perfect died for the sins of those who were unrighteous. Just so were clear about that, that would be everyone.

In coming to our passage today in verse 21, Peter essentially says that the evidence of a changed heart, the person who is saved shouldn't keep it quiet, shouldn't remain silent, but instead express their decision to believe in Christ by a public act. That public act noted in our text is baptism. The question then before us in the text is whether or not baptism has any saving merit.

I Peter 3:21

It's been a tough week in the sports world after last Sunday's display among the Football league watching these athletes take a knee during the playing of the national anthem and the display of the American flag. Pardon the pun, but I don't know where you stand on the issue.

Something I miss that always touched and impressed me was watching Everett come through those back doors into the sanctuary, pause and turn to the flag hung on the back wall and salute it. He did that every week. That act was a public admission of his devotion to this country for which he and so many others fought to defend.

It's the same with baptism. It serves as a public admission that you are identifying with Christ as your Savior, no matter what the consequences. It is an admission of two things. You are admitting that you are breaking from your old way of life and it is admitting your allegiance to Christ. The act of baptism is a serious matter that shouldn't be just another box to check off the list of spiritual rites as if doing so gained you any merit with God.

Baptism isn't just for you, it's also for others to witness. It's a testimony to the saved that an inner change has taken place in your life in which you are submitting to the Lordship of Christ.

It's a testimony to the unsaved that an inner change has taken place in your life in which you are submitting to the Lordship of Christ.

It is an admission that your allegiance has changed. You have put on a new uniform.

But it is more than just a public testimony of your salvation. Baptism also means that you are dedicating your life to follow. To live for the Lord, to be devoted and committed to Him, that you will live worthy of the Lord pleasing Him in every area of your life.

It is a public confession of your faith and a public commitment to follow Christ.

And when someone is baptized it is a reminder of your baptism and the commitment you made before God and witnesses to live a godly life.

Now that is a summary of the message, but as we haven't yet answered the initial question let me continue. It is not my intent to discuss the various modes of baptism – infant vs. believers, sprinkling vs. immersion. I think as we go along you will get a sense of what I believe Scripture teaches regarding those topics because denominations are divided. I will say this. I do believe that Scripture teaches immersion for some rather obvious reasons identified in the symbolism of the act itself, but where immersion is not possible, sprinkling may be utilized. Let me give you an example.

When I served as chaplain with hospice, I had a patient that I would visit weekly. Larry and I developed a good friendship in the months I visited. In time he trusted Christ. He would ask questions and we would talk about the Bible. Larry was a quadriplegic who could only move his head. He couldn't do anything for himself. One day he asked me about getting baptized. It was something he wanted to do. We couldn't go to a pool or squeeze into the bathroom to use the tub so the caregiver and I put some towels under his head and I poured water over him to baptize him.

Voice of the Martyrs will occasionally show pictures of believers being baptized in countries where the gospel is either prohibited or restricted. Sometimes it's just an old rusty tub or a 50 gallon drum. The believer is either sitting or standing while the baptizer pours a bucket of water on them.

I've seen pictures of soldiers being baptized in fox holes lined with a rain poncho or piled up sand bags filled with water. In another picture they filled the bucket on a front end loader.

This last summer, one of the kids who attended Agape House up in Tyrone Woods got saved and at

an end of the year pool party, was baptized with all the other kids watching.

It doesn't have to be in a nice church sanctuary with a baptistry or even a lake or river. It's not the place that matters and I'm going to say it isn't even necessarily the mode in how it's done. It's the condition of the heart.

Have you trusted Jesus as your Savior?

Are you committing yourself to follow Him?

Now I want to come to our text and as we do I want to preface the text by talking generally about baptism in Scripture.

I. BAPTISM IN SCRIPTURE

First I want to talk about Jewish baptism.

A. Jewish Baptism

We tend to think that baptism is strictly a Christian practice, but it isn't. Jews also baptized. When a non-Jew wanted to convert to Judaism, they would be baptized signifying a cleansed nature. It meant they were breaking from the past and beginning on a new journey by following Judaism.

Baptism isn't mentioned specifically in the Old Testament, yet in principle it was a practice of the Jewish people. People, priests, articles of clothing, utensils, even furniture went through a baptism if you will, where they were cleansed by water, signifying a purification.

Leviticus 8:6

Exodus 19:10-11, 14

Mark 7:3-4

These and other passages speak of a ceremonial washing or cleansing by water. This was merely an external act, which, according to Hebrews 9:9-10, doesn't cleanse but was merely something they were to do until the time of the new covenant. For the worshiper or priest it was to signify a cleansed

heart that was right with God and prepare them to meet God. Unfortunately over time, it morphed into a ritual that stripped away the symbolism and moved to legalism. You may recall the occasion when the Pharisees asked Jesus why the disciples didn't wash their hands before eating which they said the law required, a law they added as earning merit with God. It meant nothing to the condition of their heart. It was all just an external act.

The second thing we see in Scripture is was the baptism of John.

B. John's Baptism

Matthew 3:11 "I baptize you with water for repentance."

About John's baptism, Unger's Bible Dictionary states John's baptism expressed the coming of Christ. By being baptized they were confessing and preparing the way for the Messiah to come as they repented of their sins.

In Acts 19:1-5 we read that when Paul went to Ephesus he met a group of men who only knew about the baptism of John and were still looking for the Messiah to come. They didn't know that He had arrived and they didn't know anything about the baptism of the Holy Spirit. When Paul explained the gospel to them it says they believed, were baptized after which they received the Holy Spirit.

If John's baptism was one of repentance, why then was Jesus baptized?

C. Jesus' Baptism

We read in the gospel accounts that He was baptized in spite of John's reluctance to do so. John had just identified Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. If John's baptism was one of repentance, and he had just referred to Jesus as the coming Messiah, what need did Jesus have to be baptized? He was perfect and had

nothing to repent of.

I believe the baptism of Jesus was necessary for several reasons.

The first reason is that it was in obedience to the Father. I believe that it showed His humility to do the will of God.

The second reason is that in being baptized He identified with sinners, not that He became a sinner, but that He would one day take on our sin as the sacrifice for our sin.

The third reason is that He gave us an example to follow that we in turn should also be baptized.

The fourth reason is that His baptism shows us His confirmation by the Father accepting Him as His Son and identifying Him as the one who would be the sacrifice for sin. We also see His coronation by the Spirit who would empower Him in His humanity to embark on His ministry.

And fifth, I think it is revelatory of what would happen to Him. He would suffer and be put to death, buried, but raised again.

This summarily leads us to believer's baptism.

D. Believer's Baptism

Let's clarify the term baptism. John MacArthur notes that the old word was "dunked" and the person doing it was called the "dunker". There are two verbs that help to understand what this means. The first is "*bapto*" which means to immerse or to dip into. It was used in classic Greek to speak of a person dying cloth so that the material was completely immersed or submerged in the dye.

The more intensified word is "*baptizo*" which means to dip completely. In Acts it always refers to someone who confessed Christ and then was baptized by completely immersing them in water.

The noun also has the same meaning of immersion, not sprinkling which is another Greek word, which is never used of baptism. John Calvin sprinkled babies but interpreted it to mean immersion.

What we see in the New Testament, especially in the book of Acts, is a necessary progression. First there was the believing and then there was the baptizing. The baptism always came after the believing. In his sermon on the day of Pentecost, Peter preached a stirring message on the resurrected Christ stating in verse 21 "And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Notice that baptism in absent meaning that it is not required for salvation. Yet at the conclusion of his message the people in anguish over the message they just heard, were moved in their hearts to ask Peter what they should. Peter's response in verse 38 was to "repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

In Acts 8 we see someone believing before being baptized, implying that the person didn't need to be baptized in order to be saved.

Philip was instructed by the Lord to take a little trip. He's in the city of Jerusalem. Back in chapter 6 he was selected along with six other men who were "known to be full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom." They were men of godly integrity and moral character. They had a wisdom about them that was beyond their years. It doesn't mean they possessed a big IQ, but rather that they had the capacity to make sound decisions based on solid Biblical principles. They were chosen to help widows of Greek ancestry because they felt ignored in deference to the widows of Jewish decent. The Jewish widows were receiving preferential treatment and the Greek widows complained. The 12 Apostles wanted unity and equity in the church, so they instructed the church to select seven men to make sure every widow received unbiased treatment. Philip was one of those selected.

Sometime after his appointment he received a message from the Lord through an angel. He was instructed to take a little trip. Scripture tells us two things about the trip. We know the destination and

we know the route. He was to go down to Gaza about 50 miles away along a desert road.

We learn from the Old Testament that Gaza was one of the chief cities of the Philistines but it had been destroyed long before this event. There was still a road that wound through the ancient ruins. There were two roads that he could have selected to get Philip to his destination. One was a well-traveled road, with nice roadside parks and beautiful scenery. But Philip was directed by the angel to take, as Robert Frost's poem suggests, the road less traveled. It was a desolate and desert road. Few people took that road. The phrase in the Greek suggests that he began his journey at noon, which makes the request even more puzzling. Travelers avoided a desert road at noon because of the heat.

Let me digress for a moment. Would you agree that even if it doesn't make any sense, the road the Lord tells you to take is always the right road?

Philip was obedient and went even when the other route was more pleasant. He didn't need to question God or contact AAA to get a trip tik for a suggested travel route. He didn't need to Google a better route.

The Lord knows the way through the wilderness, all you have to do is follow.

Philip's godly character is evident in his willing obedience.

"This is the way, walk in it."

Our obedience always leads to God's outcomes.

Our path should always follow God's plans.

Philip, take the desert road.

Keep in mind he doesn't know the why, only the where. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, don't lean on your own understanding, in all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct or make your paths straight." (Proverbs 3:5-6)

God had in mind a divinely orchestrated encounter from which both would be blessed.

Here's a question. Has the Lord told you to get up and go and you're just sitting there waiting?

Maybe you're wondering if He was really talking to you. Maybe it was last night's chili. Maybe you're like little Samuel wondering whose voice you hear. Maybe you're hoping He changes His mind.

Maybe you're wondering if He meant later.

Maybe you're wondering if He will give you some additional clarification or instruction.

Be a Philip and get up and go, right away.

The account continues by telling us that en route to his destination he met a group traveling in the same direction on this lonely, desolate road headed toward Egypt. It wasn't a group of vacationers or traveling merchants. They weren't lost. It was the head of the treasury department for the Queen of Ethiopia. He was a high ranking government official on his way home. Maybe he wanted to take a new route home, maybe, like Philip an angel spoke to him to take this route. Still unsure about why he was to travel to Gaza, Philip fell in with the travelers. Maybe he felt safer because there was a military escort. But in the quietness of his wondering, the Spirit spoke to Philip giving him some new instructions. Go up next to that chariot. He listened to the man in the chariot reading from Isaiah 53. Seizing the opportunity he asked the fellow traveler if he understood what he was reading. He didn't but asked Philip to explain. Beginning at that passage he explained the good news about Jesus. The Ethiopian had one more question. Was there anything that prohibited him from being baptized? Philip couldn't think of any reason so they stopped the chariot near some water where he was baptized. His belief came first and then the symbol of his belief was his baptism.

My point here is to note the progression that the act of believing always comes before the act of baptism and not the other way around. In coming back to our text, we see a baptism that symbolizes.

II. BAPTISM THAT SYMBOLIZES

Referring back to the last part of verse 20, Peter speaks of Noah and his family being saved through the water because they were safe inside the ark. Peter then says that that water symbolizes baptism.

Just by reading the verse, you might conclude that the waters of baptism saves the person being baptized. But Peter qualifies what he means with the next statement.

Notes from the NIV study Bible help clarify. “There is a double figure here. The flood symbolizes baptism, and baptism symbolizes salvation. The flood was a figure of baptism in that in both instances the water that spoke of judgment (in the flood the death of the wicked, in baptism the death of Christ and the believer) is the water that saves. Baptism is a symbol of salvation in that it depicts Christ’s death, burial and resurrection and our identification with Him in these experiences. In reality, believers are saved by what baptism symbolizes – Christ’s death and resurrection. The symbol and the reality are so closely related that the symbol is sometimes used to refer to the reality.”

That simply means that baptism is an outward expression of an inward experience, symbolizing what has been done in us through the lifesaving work of Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection.

One author writes: “was Peter really saying that the act of being baptized is what saves us? If he were, he would be contradicting many other passages of Scripture that clearly show people being saved prior to being baptized or without being baptized at all [like the thief on the cross who was promised paradise when he died, without having been baptized].”

Another author says “Peter is connecting baptism with salvation, it is not the act of being baptized that he is referring to (not the removal of dirt from the flesh). Being immersed in water does nothing but wash away dirt.” What saves isn’t baptism, but the

resurrection of Jesus Christ. Today most baptisms take place months if not years after a person is saved. I was saved at 8 and baptized at 14. But in Peter’s day, as we see evidenced in Scripture, baptism took place immediately after salvation giving the impression that baptism was a necessary part of salvation.

Yet Scripture does speak about a baptism that saves.

III. BAPTISM THAT SAVES

Thinking back to John’s baptism he speaks about his baptism being one done by water, but then he states that there would be someone coming who would baptize with the Holy Spirit.

The baptism that Peter says saves us is one that comes when we put our trust or faith in Christ’s atoning sacrifice that makes the sinner righteous. This baptism is done by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit at the moment of our belief.
Romans 6:1-4

Baptism is not the means by which we come into a personal relationship with Christ, but merely a picture of what took place that made it possible for us to be in Christ. This union with Christ comes only through faith at which time we are joined in His death, burial, and resurrection. When we were saved we died in Christ and have been raised again with Christ. It is the Holy Spirit that regenerates us or makes us new confirming with our spirit that we are now the child of God. Scholars refer to this event as the baptism of the Holy Spirit.
Galatians 3:26-27 “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”

Colossians 2:12 “Having been buried with Him in baptism and raised with Him through your faith in the power of God, who raised Him from the dead.”

Titus 3:5

Louis Sperry Chafer sums it up this way: “By the Spirit’s baptism into Christ the believer is joined permanently into the Lord; he has put on Christ, and therefore, being in Christ, partakes of all that Christ is... Apart from this union which secures the imputation of the merit of Christ, there could be no standing before God and no entrance into heaven.”

The Holy Spirit makes us a new creation when, by faith we repent and trust Christ for salvation and we are baptized into the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit.

Now, let me come back full circle in what was said earlier and wrap it up with a baptism that surrenders.

IV. BAPTISM THAT SURRENDERS

Baptism is a personal decision as well as a pledge of dedication.

It’s a personal decision in that each person must decide if he or she will choose to be baptized.

While I believe that it is a command of the Lord who instructed the disciples just before His ascension to into all the world making disciples who would be baptized, it is clear baptism isn’t required for salvation. The thief on the cross next to Jesus was never baptized, yet he was promised heaven. Yet, I also see baptism as a pledge of dedication.

Peter was reminding his audience that being baptized was a public testimony to other believers of their personal faith in Christ and that it was also a witness to the non-Christian of their commitment that they were separating from their old life and choosing a new life by following Christ. In that day most likely there decision to follow Christ came with a cost.

Robyn and I have a pastor/friend who has made several trips to India to preach and teach. There is usually a baptism at one of the local rivers. He has

shared stories of family members up on the banks wailing and throwing dirt in the air because the family member being baptized was giving up the family gods to follow Christ. It was also a symbolic act indicating that they would no longer have anything to do with the one being baptized. Some not only lost their family, but might lose their job or status in the community.

It’s possible the same happened to Peter’s audience. Peter speaks about it being the pledge of a good conscience meaning that the act of baptism is a commitment on the part of the believer in all good conscience to make sure that what baptism symbolized would become a reality in their life.

Walvoord and Zuch in their commentary write that “candidates for baptism were interrogated carefully, for their submission in baptism was a step in consecration and not just an initiation rite to join the church.”

When the person was interviewed, he or she was asked if they believed in Christ for salvation and if they intended to obey God’s Word and serve Him. If they couldn’t in good conscience commit to that they were not baptized. It was a pledge.

A pledge was a legal term. The person signing the contract was pledging to do everything outlined in the contract. When we are baptized we are identifying with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. It is a testimony to the saved and unsaved alike as a public commitment that we are going to obey the Word of God. Every time someone is baptized it should be a reminder of the commitment we made when we were baptized. And if you have not been baptized, no matter how long you have been saved, maybe now is the time to make your profession of faith public.

In a moment we are going to prepare to participate in communion, which is another ordinance the Lord instituted as a reminder of His sacrifice for us. Both

baptism and communion are symbols that reconnect us to our heritage in Christ. They are reminders of who we are and how we became part of His body. They are reminders of the finished work of Christ in our lives. They are a picture of what Christ did for us and how we are able to be joined to Him.

If you have been baptized, use your time in communion to recommit to fully surrender to Him by keeping His Word.

If you have not been baptized, use your time in communion to follow the Lord's example and demonstrate your faith publicly. See me about being baptized.

Baptism symbolizes the surrender we made to Christ at salvation and the surrender we make to Christ each day by obeying His Word. It shows others we're playing for another team.